

8. QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, LEAD MEMBERS, CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES AND REPORTS FROM THE CHAIRS OF THE COMMITTEES AND QUESTIONS ON THE CHAIRS REPORTS

Question to Councillor Sarah Nelmes, Leader of the Council, from Councillor Alison Wall

8a) Why does Three Rivers only fly the Union Flag when it is required to?

The Union Flag is flown all year round from the flagpole on the Penn Chamber balcony.

Questions to Councillor Sarah Nelmes, Leader of the Council, from Councillor Sara Bedford

8b) What is the purpose of the Pensioners' Forum?

The Pensioners' Forum features presentations, discussions and questions and answers sessions on a wide range of subjects. Recent topics have included advisory services for retirees available from Citizens Advice, volunteering opportunities, tips on helping family members living with dementia, services available from a mental health charity and talks on local history. Guests can also enjoy live music and at the most recent Forum students from a local school also performed a dance routine. Attendees have been asked what topics they would like future Pensioners' Forums to cover and to suggest presenters. The last Forum resulted in one such topic being proposed and one member of the audience volunteering to make a presentation.

The activities of the Forum have been increased this year to include guided tours of Moor Par Mansion and Leavesden Country Park. Both proved popular and we have received requests to run both events again next year, which we hope to do. Other walks and tours are also being planned.

All Members are welcome to attend Pensioners' Forum events.

8c) Why has the Council stopped refunding taxi fares for attendees at the Pensioners' Forum? With the poor state of local bus routes, this makes attendance for pensioners from some areas of the District difficult/expensive.

Transport to attend a Pensioner Forum meeting was provided up to March 2020 on an ad-hoc basis when requests were received to attend the meetings. It is understood that no requests to receive funding have been received since March 2020.

Officers feel that there is scope to consider this under the work currently taking place this year to review and update our Comprehensive Equalities Policy, this includes a review of our wider community engagement strategy incorporating all our various Forum meetings.

8d) A pensioner with mobility or sensory disabilities may struggle to use public transport and may have had to give up their car for a variety of reasons. Surely the Forum should seek to encourage attendance from all areas and pensioner demographics in the District?

Officers feel that there is scope to consider this under the work currently taking place this year to review and update our Comprehensive Equalities Policy, this includes a review of our wider community engagement strategy incorporating all our various Forum meetings.

Question to Councillor Paul Rainbow, Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development, from Councillor David Raw

8e) Will this local authority fund additional enforcement officers to ensure that unlawful parking in Three Rivers does not adversely impact residents?

Hertsmere BC (HBC) currently provide the parking enforcement service on behalf of TRDC and they use their knowledge and expertise on parking enforcement to prepare relevant deployment plans for their Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to ensure parking controls and restrictions across the District are covered. There cannot be a permanent presence of CEOs in the vicinity of every control at all times. At the current time they have not suggested additional enforcement officers are required. HBC are consulted as part of any new parking scheme proposals and would advise if additional enforcement officers are required.

Question to Councillor Paul Rainbow, Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development, from Councillor Andrea Fraser

8f) Has this local authority got a strategy to increase the footfall on Rickmansworth High Street?

Yes, the Retail Parades Revitalisation (RPR) Programme improves local streetscapes to enhance both access and visual amenity of town and village centres,

*The recent **Welcome Back** initiatives in Rickmansworth (including a joint scheme between the Batchworth Community Council and the District Council) and associated schemes are providing better street furniture including seating, planters, wayfinding and signage. These are intended to help businesses recover from the pandemic.*

Other current RPR enhancements in Rickmansworth include:

- *Improving **wayfinding** signing to enable and encourage walking to local shops;*
- ***Community Street Audits** currently being carried out in local centres and*
- *Our programmed scheme to provide **new EV charging** to support businesses, shops and services in local shopping centres, which will enable shoppers to charge electric vehicles while visiting Rickmansworth High Street*

Question to Councillor Paul Rainbow, Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development, from Councillor Rue Grewal

8g) Grants are available from the Department for Transport under the On-Street Residential Charge point Scheme to fund up to 75% of the cost of installing publicly-accessible electric vehicle chargers. Broxbourne, Dacorum, St Albans, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield have all received grants worth millions of pounds to install electric vehicle chargers, showing that Hertfordshire Councils do receive permission and can receive funding. Why has Three Rivers not done so?

These grants fund 60% of chargers and the scheme is aimed at providing on-street chargers for residents (as stated in the scheme title). Only Watford BC has installed on-street chargers to date.

Hertfordshire County Council as the Local Highway and Traffic Authority, has produced a tool to assess demand from residents without off-street parking and is working on its EV Strategy (draft since June 2021) which is expected to be published this Autumn and which will set out to what extent it will support on-street charging.

Significantly, the County Council's emerging objectives promote charging at destinations (car parks) rather than on-street charging, with on-street charging allowed only in exceptional circumstances, so once it's Strategy is published, District Councils will be in a position to consider whether this addresses local needs.

Question for Cllr Paul Rainbow, Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development from Cllr Chris Mitchell

8h) I accompanied Living Streets to walk around Croxley Green. They seem to have a wide remit and had lots of ideas. When will we hear the outcome of their survey and recommendation and how will this link with the cycling review currently underway?

The report of the surveys will feed into the Local Cycling and Walking Development Plan and will be published alongside it in early 2023. Recommendations will be considered by the Local Highway Authority in the next year.

Question to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Planning Policy and Infrastructure, from Councillor Stephen Cox

8i) Exactly what credence were representatives of the Scouts and indeed members of the public entitled to place upon the report to the Planning Committee of 15 December 2016 in respect of this authority's own planning application 16/2305/FUL and does he stand by the contents of that report and if not why not?

As advised on a similar questions raised previously on four occasions the Planning Committee report was based on the information as it was understood by officers at the time. Subsequent legal advice has now given a different understanding. Officers are continuing to consider any alternative options but any provision for parking is dependent upon the Leaseholder of the Pavilion being in agreement.

Question to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Planning Policy and Infrastructure, from Councillor David Raw

8j) Can this Council consider bringing back a Conservation Officer in-house who is able to develop a knowledge of the local area?

The Council has a contract in place with Place Services until June 2023. Whilst the Council could consider recruiting a Conservation Officer, however it should be noted that we were unsuccessful in recruiting one in the past and this is now a common problem with many Council's. It is difficult to find experienced candidates that can provide conservation advice to the level that we are currently receiving from Place Services.

Using an external organisation rather than recruiting an individual conservation officer strengthens the Council's resilience in this area by having multiple specialists that provide conservation advice rather than relying on one individual covering all of the work.

Question to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Planning Policy and Infrastructure, from Councillor Abbas Merali

8k) Ensuring the planning process is complied with is fundamental to ensure the credibility of the planning system. There have been a number of incidents across the District where work has taken place without appropriate planning permission and without being enforced. What is the Council doing to ensure that robust action is taken when the planning process is not abided by to prevent this trend continuing?

Officers are aware of some incidents where work has taken place without the appropriate planning permission, I do not consider that this is a 'trend'. The department receives over 180 enforcement cases a year (sometimes this has been nearer 300) and is heavily reliant on members of the public to report works.

Importantly, it should be noted that breaches of planning control do not constitute a criminal offence. The National Planning Policy Framework states that Council's should act proportionally and proactively to enforcement matters and this is reflected in the Council's own Enforcement Plan (2021). The Council must only take the appropriate enforcement action where it is expedient to do so. In a large majority of cases it is simply not expedient to pursue enforcement action as the works may not be harmful and would accord with the Council's development plan. Additionally, the planning system allows the submission of retrospective planning applications and such applications must be determined by the Local Planning Authority. Where breaches of planning control have been identified Officers will request appropriate actions with specific timeframes. Some actions may require works to be removed or encourage the submission of a pre-application or a formal planning application with a view of formalising the breach. The submission of part retrospective or retrospective applications enables Officers the ability to alter works, if applicable, to ensure they are acceptable in planning terms. In many other cases, breaches are rectified informally or enforcement notices served whereby the breach is considered expedient and contrary to the development plan.

Question to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Planning Policy and Infrastructure, from Councillor Ciaran Reed

8l) You have suggested at a number of Committee meetings that the Planning Inspectorate have been instructed to not refuse Local Plans for failing to meet the housing numbers set out in the Standard Methodology. Where have you found this and what impact will this have on our Three Rivers Local Plan?

The instruction was from the then secretary of state Greg Clark prior to the election of the current Prime Minister. This will not impact the Three Rivers Local Plan as it stands and as you know this Council does not support the figures arrived at for Three Rivers through Standard Methodology. We await the Prime Minister and the new secretary of state to deliver on their promise 'to abolish the top-down, Whitehall-inspired Stalinist housing targets'.

Question to Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Planning Policy and Infrastructure, from Councillor Philip Hearn

8m) Has this administration's failure to implement a Local Plan put our green spaces in the Green Belt and AONB, such as Green Street in Chorleywood, under threat?

No, national policies on Green Belt and AONB still afford these areas protection. Appeal decisions on development proposals within the Green Belt and AONB have given significant weight to these policies and as reported have led to refusals. It should be noted that there may be appropriate development in these areas and these have to be considered on a case by case basis and on their merits against planning policies.

Question for Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

8n) I want to thank you and the officers who are working on the local plan for seeing good progress being made. I am aware that time has slipped by, and can you confirm when you will now put the draft plan out for its second Regulation 18 consultation. I would like to know you are going to avoid the Christmas period to ensure residents have the time to fully respond.

A report updating the Council's Local Development Scheme (Local Plan timetable) will be brought to one of the forthcoming Local Plan Sub-Committees for consideration. I can give an assurance that there will not be any consultation over the

Christmas/ New Year period and if we did consult and it covers over holiday periods I expect us to extend the consultation as appropriate.

Question for Councillor Andrew Scarth, Lead Member for Housing, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

80) I have been informed by officers that despite pledging to take 20 refugees via government resettlement programmes in September 2020 TRDC currently only have three, with another three having left. Is the lead member satisfied with this progress and how would he explain this to the several hundred Afghan families currently waiting to be resettled in hotels, many of whom have waited for more than a year? I am not including Ukrainian which is a different scheme.

In September 2020, following a motion at Full Council, the Council agreed to house 20 Syrian refugees via the VPR Scheme (limited to five families). It was agreed that this commitment would begin in April 2021.

This was in addition to ten Syrian refugees that the Council agreed to house in the district previously. This earlier commitment was fulfilled in 2017, with two families of five Syrian refugees moving to the District in the August and September of that year. These two families remain in the District.

Whilst recruitment was undertaken for the post that would be responsible for this new commitment and the search for suitable and affordable began, due to the developing situation in Afghanistan throughout May and June 2021, the UK Government launched the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Program (ARAP).

The ARAP Scheme offered relocation to former locally employed staff in Afghanistan. In June 2021, the Council agreed to accept two families as part of this scheme. Because of the urgent nature of the circumstances, this program was prioritised over the Syrian refugees.

In July 2021, the Council were informed that a Syrian refugee family of five people, that was originally housed in East Lothian, Scotland in 2017, had facilitated a mutual exchange of social housing tenancies and had moved into our District. A request was made to the Council if we would provide support for this family and become responsible for the management of Home Office funds allocated to this family. It should be noted that this family have recently decided to relocate to another area of the country.

The Council were able to secure accommodation for the first Afghan family to be moved to the District via the ARAP Scheme in August 2021. This family decided that they did not wish to remain in Three Rivers and in February 2022 they moved out of the accommodation to reside with family members that were located in the Greater Manchester area. By undertaking this move the family were removed from the ARAP Scheme by the Home Office entirely.

The Council secured a second property in late 2021 and in February 2022 a second Afghan family moved to the District via the ARAP Scheme. This family remain in the District, are receiving ongoing support from the Refugee Council and from all reports are settling into the area well.

Although the Council have technically fulfilled our commitment to house two Afghan families in the district as part of the ARAP Scheme, as the first family left the District in February 2022, we are still looking for a suitable property to house a further Afghan family via the ARAP Scheme.

Once a property is secured for the remaining Afghan family, work will continue to secure properties for our remaining commitment to house Syrian refugees.

It was agreed by the Council that any property secured for either group of refugees would need to be via the private rented sector with a rental price that would not exceed the current Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

This creates a difficulty to secure suitable accommodation as the vast amount of rental properties available in the District have rental prices that vastly exceed the LHA. A further difficulty is created by landlords that are often reluctant to offer a tenancy to a family from this cohort.

Additional pressures placed on the private rental market in the district by external influences, such as the COVID 19 pandemic, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the cost of living crisis cannot be ignored and have also had a significant impact in the Council's search for suitable properties.

Question to Councillor Chris Lloyd, Lead Member for Leisure, from Councillor Stephen King

8p) Is this authority aware that disabled access to South Oxhey Playing Fields and other areas is being restricted as RADAR keys which should allow access do not work on many gates. What action is proposed to be taken to resolve the problem?

Grounds Maintenance have checked the gates which require a RADAR key and have found that the only issue is the Hayling Road Play Area which they are looking to resolve. If Councillors or members of the public could make officers aware of the location of any other gates that are causing issues then these can be looked into.

Questions to Councillor Chris Lloyd, Lead Member for Leisure, from Councillor Sara Bedford

8q) What does the Lead Member believe is the purpose of S106 funds for leisure and associated projects?

S106 funds are to be used for the stated purpose for which they are given as set out in the definition section of the particular Section 106 deed which secured them.

8r) How does the Council determine when a project should be funded using S106 funds, rather than using other capital funds?

S106 funds are used for the stated purpose for which they are given as set out in the definition section of the particular Section 106 deed which secured them. They are the primary source of funding in the particular area in which the deed was secured. Capital funds are then used for the remaining budget if required. Recent examples include the funding of a Wildwood Den (Natural Play Space) at Rickmansworth Aquadrome, stock fencing for the cattle grazing at The Horses' Field, The Swillett Play Area, Chorleywood and the Abbots Langley Leisure Project.

Projects are identified for the funding to be used and then approval is sought from the Lead Member and the Director of Community and Environmental Services.

Question for Councillor Chris Lloyd, Lead Member for Leisure, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

8s) Can you update us on the No Mow policy used this year? What percentage of the normally managed grass land was this policy actually applied to and how do you calculate this? What plans are there for next year? Can you look at putting up information boards to explain to residents why this is being done?

A report will be presented to the 7 November Policy and Resources Committee and 23 November Leisure, Environment and Community Committee with an update on the 2022 Alternative Grass Cutting Management.

Question for Cllr Phil Williams. Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change and Sustainability from Cllr Chris Mitchell.

8t) One of the most important projects has been to insulate the housing for less well-off residents. Progress has been made using the funding that did exist. To take this further how can Three Rives benefit from the ECO4 funding and what is being done to make sure we can get the best funding possible from this source.

The Council will have two access routes for ECO4 funding and has plans to promote both extensively.

The first routes is a dedicated ECO4 project with E.ON (an obligated energy company) which will initially target eligible homes in South Oxhey. Officers are at the final stages of contract negotiation to enable this partnership project with E.ON which will deliver targeted schemes with E.ON for the duration of the ECO4 scheme until 2026.

The second route to ECO4 funding is through our Home Energy Support Service which is provided by independent fuel poverty charity 'Better Housing Better Health'. Under this route, residents who have not been contacted to partake in the targeted E.ON scheme can contact the Home Energy Support Service team who will undertake an assessment of their eligibility for ECO4, and refer the resident to the most suitable pre-qualified contractor who can deliver ECO4-funded measures on behalf of obligated energy companies.

It is also likely that ECO4 installers outside of the two routes above will be working to deliver ECO4 measures around the District. Residents who qualify under the main ECO4 criteria (not Flex criteria) will be able to have measures installed by these ECO4 installers independently of the Council and the organisations mentioned in the two main routes.

At the current moment, Ofgem are yet to release final delivery guidance for the scheme. Once this final guidance is published, the Council will be able to finalise and publish our Statement of Intent on our website and commence both ECO4 initiatives.

Question for Cllr Phil Williams. Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change and Sustainability form Cllr Chris Mitchell

8u) I recently attended an Institution of Civil engineers Hazard forum event on Resilience. Climate change is happening now, proven by the summer we have just had with record temperatures, and fires in South Oxhey and other parts of the UK. We are now having far more serious rainfall events that are causing flooding in places that have not seen them before. The "rain bomb" in Western Germany last year is a frightening example.

To mitigate the damage to people and property, we need to start taking resilience seriously. The process is Resilience, Adaptation and mitigation. We first need to understand what our risks are now and what will get worse. The body of knowledge on this subject considers that for every £1 spent now, will save £5 plus in the future.

I suggest we need to start working seriously on Resilience for Three Rivers as soon as possible. Does the Lead Member agree and if so, what is planned to take this forward?

The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) which Three Rivers is a member of, and whose meetings I attend, have been working on adaptation for nearly a year now. It is recognised that this requires county-level involvement as well as local action.

At Three Rivers, our Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan both address adaptation. This, together with the support provided by HCCSP, has enabled the Council to get a head start on this planning. To date, key officers have attended adaptation training and an internal core working group has been

established. This group has identified the need for the updates required under each service to include climate risks and work is commencing with Heads of Service to include this in the current service planning cycle.

The Lead Local Flood Authority has identified two vulnerable flood areas in the district to be pilots for retrofit SUDS installations. These are in South Oxhey and Northwood. They have secured funding for scoping work but it is likely that CIL funds will be required for some or all of the installations.

Questions to Councillor Roger Seabourne, Lead Member for Community Safety and Partnerships, from Councillor Sara Bedford

8v) What action has Council taken, including with partners, following the definition of Antisemitism adopted at the meeting on 1 September 2020?

8w) What has been the results of these actions?

8x) How is the success or otherwise of any actions measured?

8y) What action has Council taken, including with partners, following the definition of Islamophobia adopted at the meeting on 1 September 2020?

8z) What has been the results of these actions?

8aa) How is the success or otherwise of any actions measured?

Combined response to questions 8v to 8aa

Since the adoption of both the anti-Semitism and Islamophobia definitions on 1 September 2020

- *Appointed a dedicated Community Liaison Officer with a remit to work on hate crime and provision of support for and engagement with refugees in the District*
- *The Equalities Sub-committee has received reports and considered the work of the Council and its partners in identifying and addressing issues related to hate crime and Prevent*
- *Officer from the Community Partnerships Service have worked with our communities through mosques and synagogues in neighbouring districts/borough throughout the pandemic in order to identify need and offer support. (The support offered included but was not limited to finance, mental health and domestic abuse).*
- *the community safety partnership continues to have Hate Crime and remains an identified priority of the Community Safety Partnership and its levels are monitored by the Board with interventions and awareness raising activities planned as appropriate for example join engagement events with local Police Services in key areas to inform communities where they can access support. This next events will take place during Hate Crime Awareness Week (8-15th October)*
- *Learning and Development has been provided and made available to TRDC staff and partners. The most recent workshop was on 28 September with further sessions to take place through-out the year*
- *The Councils new equalities objectives have been developed and agreed as:*
 - *To promote Equality of Opportunity in Employment & Training*

- *To improve equality and access to services for all residents.*
 - *To strengthen knowledge and understanding of all Three Rivers communities.*
 - *To celebrate diversity, promote inclusion and enhance community life in partnership with communities*
- *The Councils Auditors (SIAS) undertook an Audit of Equalities and Diversity and officers have acted to deliver on its recommendations which primarily concentrated on the development and roll out of mandatory Equalities training across the organisation*
 - *The Councils Equalities Policy is undergoing its scheduled review and the renewed policy will be presented to Committee and Council in due course. The work is currently programmed to be completed by March 2023*

Question to Councillor Keith Martin, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Alison Wall

8bb) What is being done to reduce call waiting times when residents try to contact Three Rivers?

For most customers online self-serve forms is the easiest and most convenient way for customers to contact the Council. The Council are continuing to encourage customers to use online self-serve contact methods if they have internet access across multiple methods including the phone queue messages, social media, the Council's website, and by offering to show people how to sign up to an online account or e-newsletter when speaking to a CSC Representative either on the phone or in person in the Visitor Centre. Encouraging customers to make use of self-serve online forms will reduce the call waiting times for those that cannot use online services. The CSC continue to monitor live calls waiting and adjust the number of CSC Reps answering calls at peaks in demand and when there is officer resource available. In recent months staff resources have been limited within the CSC due to vacancies and the challenges relating to the reduced number of applicants applying for jobs. Following a recent recruitment drive we now have filled those vacancies, but it will take several weeks to train those new officers.

Question to Councillor Keith Martin, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Andrea Fraser

8cc) What is being done to reassure residents that their FOI requests will be responded to in a timely manner?

The majority of FOI requests are responded to within the 20 working day guidance, however in some cases if they are particularly complex then it may take slightly longer, in this instance the customer will be contacted with an updated timeframe.

Questions to Councillor Keith Martin, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Sara Bedford

8dd) Two years ago, this Council agreed that all contractors working for the Council should be paid the Real Living Wage. At the last Council meeting, the Lead Member for Resources stated that contractors working for this Council are still not being paid the RLW, because the Council could not vary existing contracts. The Solicitor to the Council has confirmed the legal principle that a contract CAN be varied with the consent of both parties. As the SLM contract has already been varied (or reprofiled)

including at the last Council on more than one occasion, could the Lead Member tell me when the offer was made to SLM to vary the contract to pay the RLW to all staff, with the full cost being paid by Three Rivers?

There have been ongoing discussions with SLM over the reprofiled management fee, increase in swimming lesson prices and the Real Living Wage. Agreement was made about the RLW on 27 June 2022 and a formal contract variation was made on 3 August 2022

8ee) Could the Lead Member tell me what reason SLM had for declining this offer, which would have increased staff recruitment and retention?

SLM have not declined the offer

8ff) Could the Lead Member also tell me whether a similar offer regarding the RLW was made to other companies who supply the council with contract staff and when and why it was declined?

Tenon FM provide cleaning services for Watersmeet, Batchworth Depot, Basing House and Three Rivers House. Their staff are paid the National Minimum wage. The contract is due for renewal in January 2023 when the requirement to provide the Real Living wage will be implemented

Question to Councillor Keith Martin, Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, from Councillor Chris Mitchell

8gg) I have had a number of complaints about the customer services phone service. Residents are waiting for long times, up for an hour but usually around 30 minutes to get through to an operator. The staff are very pleasant and sometime apologise. This is not a good service; I have mentioned this to the CEO. Do you keep records of how long people are waiting and providing you agree that this is not a good service what are you doing about it.

The average call wait time in September was 8 minutes 40 seconds and longest individual call wait time was 41 minutes 31 seconds. The phone line is particularly busy on Mondays, early mornings and lunch times and wait times fluctuate depending on particular circumstances e.g. Council Tax rebate claims.

Please refer to answer to question 8bb for further response.